

From a Spark to a Consuming Flame

BY FR. MARTIN

It is astonishing how a tiny spark can ignite a life-changing flame. This power can be destructive, as seen in a story about a motorist who carelessly tossed a cigarette butt, triggering a devastating wildfire. However, I believe that same principle applies to compassion: a single spark of mercy can set an enduring mission ablaze.

In 1999, while training as a teacher in southern Nigeria, I encountered a seven-year-old boy, born blind, begging by the roadside. He was isolated, deprived of education, and left alone in a world that had reduced him to destitution. This tragic sight, a reflection of countless marginalized youths with disabilities across the country, often confined indoors and without access to basic services, pierced my heart. The lack of government support for these individuals fueled a divine calling: to establish a supportive community for them. This vision was the initial spark of inspiration that took hold of my soul. With no financial backing or real project plan in place, I was not deterred. I trusted the Holy Spirit to provide and guide the undertaking.

Two years after my ordination to the priesthood, I shared this dream with Dr. Mary, who introduced me to Lauren Seibler, a powerful force who became the wind to fan the spark into flame. Soon, a dedicated team, including Grace Murphy, Donna Roane, Linda Iglima, Rhode Aleger, Bandele Onasanya and Uche Onyibe, joined the mission. After securing the Bishop's essential approval, the vision was translated into reality. In 2020, the Society of St. Bartimaeus (SSB) was established as a 501(c)(3) organization.

Our primary objective is to build and sustain a residential community providing housing, quality care, food, clothing, education, and basic medical attention for marginalized individuals, regardless of their location or condition. The progress to date demonstrates that the initial spark has indeed become a consuming flame. We now possess a two-acre campus featuring a residential building that opened in 2023. This center is home to over 20 permanent residents, including children and adults with severe disabilities. To ensure financial sustainability, we have built a sachet water factory. Furthermore, we operate a mini-clinic that serves both the community and poor villagers, and our resident trained midwife, Sister Vianney, has safely delivered approximately 10 babies since inception. A gazebo has also been established for the village children to gather for the daily Rosary. The fire of our mission continues to spread.



The Madonna of the Streets

by Interim SSB President Dr. Mary Soha

This image has always been dear to my heart. Here Our Lady is shown tired, ragged, cold and hungry - but not alone. With her eyes gazing upward, she shelters the Child Jesus. He rests comfortably on her thin shoulder, warm, content, and at peace. She gives her ALL for the Child. She pulls us into the streets to meet Christ with her. She helps us to see that all creation is sacred and Holy because of Christ- no matter how poor, handicapped or depressed. She asks us to open our hearts to Christ in a more personal and intimate encounter through the people we are called to serve. Those who participate in the St. Bartimaeus Society through their prayers and contributions are brought into a very personal encounter with the face of Christ in the poor. Fr. Martin is the bridge who brings us into this encounter with Christ. To witness one of Our Lady's priestly sons who so unites his will with God's will is a blessing and inspiration for all of us to do the same. And so we pray..."Open the eyes of our hearts to see and recognize You in the faces of all people, especially those in need with disabilities, the helpless blind, the frail elderly, and those who are isolated, starving, and living in slums." Our Lady of the Streets. Pray for us!



Residents in our SSB Living Center - we are family.

On November 15, 2025, I traveled to Nigeria to open our new educational facility named *Alonso Academy*, currently under construction. This school will start in August 2026, to serve our residents and the local villagers, offering both primary and secondary education. It is profoundly moving to know that the people of this village will soon have a functional school close by, a stark contrast to my own childhood of walking miles to attend school. At the dedication Mass of the education center, a little girl from the village approached me and said, "Father, you gave us Jesus." Her words stayed with me. I know that Christ is already present among His people, especially the poor, yet when our lives reflect God's compassion, we make His presence visible to others. You, our benefactors, bring Christ to the poor through your continued love and generosity. I humbly ask that you continue to walk with us in serving God's people and giving hope and happiness to those in most need. People may not recognize your giving, yet God sees all, even the simplest gift, and will repay you.

We are deeply grateful to all of you who have made our achievements a reality. The spark is still spreading, but it requires continuous fuel. We appeal to you to keep serving as the wind to keep this vital work burning. May God's grace accompany you in every step you take.

Fr. Martin Ibeh,

SSB Spiritual Advisor



OUR LABOR OF LOVE My name is Sr. Mary Johnvianney Nwoye, MsMMR. I serve as the Mother Responsible at the Society of St. Bartimaeus Center, popularly known in this part of Nigeria as "Ala-Nso," meaning "Holy Ground." I am eternally grateful to God for calling me to the religious life. In thanksgiving for this calling, I have devoted my life to serving those in need, to be hands for those who have none, eyes for those who cannot see, and to care for Christ present in the poor who continually calls me to serve Him. Each day, I hear the Lord inviting me to go deeper into this labor of love. He has always been faithful, filling me with the strength and joy needed to serve.

At present, we care for twenty people in our facility. They include those crippled by polio or accidents, persons with mental disabilities, quadriplegics, the paralyzed, and elderly men and women who are frail and have no one to care for them. Some come to us for temporary assistance, staying for a period to receive medical treatment, nourishment, and the physical, emotional, and spiritual support they need until they are strong enough to return home. I am deeply grateful for my coworkers in the vineyard, whose dedication and selfless service help meet the many needs of our brothers and sisters. Our task is not easy, but the grace of God has been our constant strength.



MILESTONES 2025

a brief overview of the workings of the Holy Spirit at SSB



PRAYING FOR GODS WILL IN BUILDING AN EDUCATIONAL CENTER

- We began praying and dreamed of building a school for the impoverished who have no where to go to be educated. Schools are costly and far in distance from our village. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, We continue to witness God's providence.



BROKE GROUND FOR OUR NEW EDUCATION CENTER



- The Lord always provides. Our new educational facility is currently under construction, Alanso Academy - Holy Ground.



BUILT ADDITION TO SSB CENTER - ROSARY GAZEBO

- Rosary Gazebo - outdoor worship area for the residents.
- Beautiful Space where children from the village gather to pray the rosary together.



THE SACHET WATER FACTORY:

"ACQUAVIVA" TRANSLATES TO "LIVING WATER"

- The National Agency for Food & Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) in Nigeria has officially approved our sachet water factory at our SSB Center.
- The factory will be producing pure water packaged in clear plastic bags & bottles - creating a profitable source of income for SSB.
- This educational facility will educate the whole child: mind, body and soul. How grateful we are for these opportunities.
- Construction continues, as our classrooms are built out, etc.



OPENING OF SCHOOL FOR LEARNING

- Alanso Academy opening in August 2026, to serve our residents and the local villagers, offering both primary and secondary education.

2,000+
People Praying

We pray & trust. In solidarity, please join us in spirit, every First Saturday of the month as Fr. Martin Ibeh offers Mass for our SSB Benefactors.



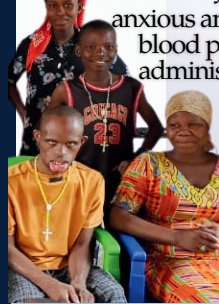
NEWS FROM THE SSB CENTER

by: Sr. Johnvianney

Our center, Ala-Nso, has become a meeting place for the surrounding villages. People come to fetch water, recharge their phones using our solar-powered electricity, receive basic medical care, pray the rosary with us in the evenings, or simply talk and find peace in the welcoming spirit of our community. We are forever grateful to you, our benefactors because you support us, we are able to serve the poor. Words cannot adequately express our thanks. May God Himself reward you, blessing you far beyond what you can imagine. We pray that you will continue to support us, and by God's



grace, we will remain faithful and dedicated to this labor of love. One of those we serve as a labor of love at Ala-Nso is Uchenna, a 20-year-old young man with Down syndrome. He is mentally challenged, yet very gentle and loving. Uche loves food, and whenever he sees someone, his first words are usually, "Food, food, food. I want to eat food. Come and eat food." One day, Uche fell ill and did not mention food at all. I knew immediately that something was seriously wrong. I felt anxious and troubled as I checked his vital signs, his blood pressure was low. I prayed fervently and administered the necessary medication. That day, I prayed with many tears because I see each person here as my own child. God heard our prayers and restored Uche to good health. Whenever any of those in our care are sick, I feel their pain deeply until they recover. Through this work, God continues to teach me love and patience. God Bless the SSB.



OUR NEW EDUCATIONAL FACILITY

